

ENS DaJuane Harris
JrCOSTEP – Summer 2005
Santa Fe Service Unit, New Mexico
Albuquerque Area IHS
Photo: DaJuane and EHT Anthony Candelaria

Hello, my name is DaJuane Harris. I was born and raised in Lexington, KY. I am a non-traditional student currently attending Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) in Richmond, KY, as a junior in the Environmental Health Science program. I first became exposed to environmental health science while attending Lexington Community College where I was fortunate enough to see a presentation given by Commissioned Corps officer, CAPT Daniel Harper, who works for the CDC and is a visiting professor at EKU. I had never heard of environmental health science before and



the information that was presented intrigued me, so I spoke with CAPT Harper after the presentation and he told me about the EHS program at EKU, and that I should check it out. So, after a few visits with him and Prof. Joe Beck I became convinced and I transferred to EKU. CAPT Harper had told me about the Commissioned Corps and its opportunities and I became more interested after meeting officers Julia Chervoni, Chris Buchanan, Doris Ravenell-Brown, and Ret. RADM Webb Young. They all encouraged me to apply for a COSTEP position so that I could gain a firsthand experience into what the Commissioned Corps was all about.

I took their advice and I applied for a COSTEP. I was fortunate enough to be chosen for a COSTEP in Santa Fe, New Mexico, serving under LCDR Celeste Davis and LTJG Christian Witkovskie, an EKU alumnus, who had contacted me about the opening for the position. I arrived in Santa Fe, May 15th and I reported for duty May 16th. It took a few days for me to get used to the altitude, but I loved the weather in Santa Fe because there is little to no humidity, unlike back home where the summer humidity is 85-90%. Our unit provides services for eight pueblos: Cochiti, Nambe, Pojoaque, San Felipe, San Ildefonso, Santa Clara, Santo Domingo, and Tesuque. We conduct environmental health surveys for restaurants, casinos, convenience stores, schools, daycares, senior citizen centers, celebrations, and food warehouses. We also give presentations for food handlers training, injury prevention, West Nile Virus, Hantavirus, and Plague. Rabies clinics and seatbelt surveys are other services that we perform in the pueblos. For about 8 weeks I would go on surveys with Christian, Anthony Candelaria, our unit Environmental Health Technician, or Echo Dorsey, who was our other environmental health COSTEP. For the last 4 weeks, Echo and I scheduled surveys and performed them on our own.

On June 30th, Echo and I, along with the other COSTEPs affiliated with the Albuquerque Area Office, attended a COSTEP orientation in Albuquerque. We met CAPT Paul McSherry, who

gave us a presentation that covered the history of the Commissioned Corps, the benefits, and some of the pitfalls to watch out for. We had lunch as a group with CDRs Jeff Morris, Darrell LaRoche, and Mitch Constant. After lunch we heard presentations from LCDR Celeste Davis and CDRs Morris, LaRoche, and Constant. I was also given a special project to develop Epi Info databases for Rabies Vaccination, Food Handlers Training, and Community Environmental Health Surveys. After the project's completion, I will create a PowerPoint presentation, which will be presented at the Albuquerque Area Office on August 5th.

Overall, this experience has been very beneficial to me because I got a chance to learn, serve, and interact with a different culture that has a very rich and complex heritage. I went whitewater rafting for the first time on the Rio Grande. I got to enjoy the excellent New Mexican cuisine. I was privileged enough to meet some of the pueblo leaders, and I got to see some of the beautiful and intricate dances that are performed at the various celebrations. I greatly appreciated the time and patience that Celeste, Christian, and Anthony spent while working with me, especially the history lessons I received when I would travel with Anthony.

In closing, I strongly encourage anyone who is an EHS major or interested in the health sciences to apply for a COSTEP because it is truly the experience of a lifetime.